



Always Together by teej.318

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Summary: Mike is working all the time and attending law school classes at night, leaving his relationship with Will strained. Things come to a head during an argument, forever changing their relationship.

Always Together

Mike slowly crept into the bedroom, doing his best to make sure he didn't wake Will. He shed his shoes and pants, putting them away slowly before he changed into a large T-shirt and got onto his side of the bed. Will was fast asleep on his side and Mike sighed to himself, wondering how he got so lucky to share his life with the young man sleeping peacefully next to him.

Mike and Will had been dating ever since they graduated high school four years earlier. Since then, Will had started his career as an artist, while Mike was working to become a lawyer. He was nearly finished with law school and would be admitted to the New York Bar in six months' time if all went to plan. In order to make ends meet, Mike was working at a local Barnes and Noble during the day, while taking his law school classes at night. Mike's busy work and school schedule meant that he and Will didn't get to see each other as often as they would like. But they made it work and still loved each other deeply, despite all of the trials and tribulations.

Once he was in bed, Mike slowly buried himself in the blankets. Once he was comfortable, Will turned over in his sleep and as if he were a magnet drawn to Mike, leaned into Mike, wrapping his arms around him. Mike smiled as he held onto Will and gave him a kiss on the forehead.

"I love you so much, baby," Mike whispered as quietly as he could. "Soon we'll get to see each other a whole lot more. I promise."

Mike closed his eyes and instantly fell asleep from his exhaustion.

"Good morning, sleepy head," Will said in a playful voice as Mike walked into their kitchen, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"Hi," Mike said in a sleepy voice as he bent down and gave Will a kiss on the forehead. He then opened his eyes wider and noticed the pile of eggs and bacon that were sitting on the table for him. "Oh my god, you are a saint."

Will giggled.

"Anything for you, my love," he cooed.

Mike sat down and started to devour his breakfast. Will grinned at him and seemed content to watch Mike eating. When Mike was finished, he drank a large gulp of coffee and felt the rest of his body wake up.

"Thanks for an amazing breakfast, Will. I love you so much."

Will smiled.

"I love you, too, baby. I always will."

"Ugh, I can't believe I have to work in just two hours! Can't I call in today?"

"No, Mikey, you have to go in, you know that. It's just for a few more months and then you'll be the best lawyer in the state of New York."

Mike grinned as Will leaned forward and gave Mike a kiss on the lips.

"You gonna be home for dinner tonight, babe?"

"Of course," Mike said. "With us having a test last night, they decided to give us the night off, so I can finally spend time with you."

Will hummed.

"Good, because I have a surprise for you when you get home."

"A surprise? For me? Why, what'd I do?"

"Nothing, you big dolt," Will said as he gave Mike a slight slap on the arm. "I just want to do something special for you, for us. We don't get to see each other at night anymore and I want to make tonight special."

Mike smiled.

"You really are the best, you know that?"

"Pretty much," Will said with a nod.

"I'll be off at 6:30 and I should be back by 7," Mike said as he giggled. "Then we can spend the whole evening together and just relax."

"You had better be here by 7. If you're even a minute late, I'll curse you!" Will said, grinning mischievously.

"Okay, okay, Will the Wise, I will be here right at 7!"

Mike sighed as he slid his key into the apartment door. It was 10:30 and he was just getting home. He knew Will would be pissed, even if he had gotten Mike's voicemails explaining what was going on. But, he thought Will would understand Mike's predicament and wouldn't be too upset with him.

The door opened and Mike walked into the house. He immediately felt a pang of guilt when he saw the dining room table. A delicious looking meal of all of Mike's favorite foods - steak, mashed potatoes, corn on the cob and dinner rolls - was spread on the table. Will was fast asleep on the table, resting his head on one of his arms.

Mike tried to stifle some tears at Will's gesture. He had always felt like Will being in love with him was too good to be true, and Will making such a special dinner for them and Mike missing it seemed to prove it.

Mike bent down next to Will and gently shook him away.

"Hey, babe, I'm so sorry," Mike whispered as Will woke up and rubbed his eyes.

"What time is it?" Will asked in a tone devoid of any of his usual warmth.

"It's 10:30, Will. I'm so sorry that I'm late."

"Where the hell have you been?" Will demanded as he stood up, anger coursing through his veins.

Mike was taken aback.

"Didn't you get my voicemails?" he asked. Will frowned at him. "I called you like five times at 5:30, Will. I had to cover for Jeff because he had a family emergency. Iris needed me to help close the store and I knew we could use the extra money, so I agreed."

"You didn't think to call me first?"

"I did call you, Will. Didn't you hear me? I called you five times and left you a bunch of voicemails to ask if it was okay."

"But you didn't wait until you heard from me. You just stayed at work. How typical of you, Michael."

Mike's eyes widened in shock.

"What's that supposed to mean?" he asked.

"You keep choosing your work over me, Michael! Over us! We never get to spend any time together and the one time you have a night off, you blow me off to work for someone else. What the hell?"

"Will, honey..." Mike said, trying to sound soothing but it came out in an annoyed tone instead. He took a deep breath to calm himself down. "Look, I'm not trying to put my career before us, before you. God, I would never put anything or anyone before you, Will. I love you too much for that."

"Well you have a sure as hell funny way of showing it!"

"Well excuse the fuck out of me for trying to make sure all of the bills are paid!" Mike shouted, his anger now matching Will's. "I thought you would be okay with me working a few extra hours so we have more money in our bank account!"

"I don't give a shit about the money!" Will retorted. "I care about spending time with you because I thought I was supposed to spend time with the man I love!"

"Will, I'm sorry. But, listen, can you really fault me for getting some extra hours? We really could use it."

"Michael, are you even listening to yourself right now?" Will asked. "I

just told you I don't fucking care about the money. I care about spending time with *you*, but you obviously don't feel the same way."

"How can you say that, Will?" Mike asked. The anger was coursing through him like never before. He took several calming breaths and felt his adrenaline level go down slightly before he continued speaking, now in a much calmer voice. "Will, I'm trying to provide for us so we can live the best life possible. Neither of us are making much money right now, and we really need as much money as we can get. But when I finally have my law degree and you open up an art gallery or start selling your work, then we'll be making real money, and we won't have to work as much!"

Will scoffed.

"Yeah, sure, Michael. Until you start taking case after case after case so you don't have to come home on time, and you can just stay at the office," he said angrily. Mike's eyes widened again. "Why don't you just admit that you don't want to spend time with me?"

"Will...you know that's not true. I love you, Will. I love you with all my heart. I always have, Will. Crazy together, remember?"

Will took a deep breath to calm himself down.

"Maybe we need to take a break," he said shortly.

Mike gasped and cupped a hand to his mouth. He couldn't believe what he had just heard.

"What?" Mike asked in a trembling voice.

"Maybe we need to take a break from each other," Will said calmly. "Look at us, Mike, fighting like this. We never used to fight like this. Maybe we need some time apart to make sure this is right, us being together."

Mike blinked as tears started to run down his cheeks.

"W-w-w-Will...I love you," he stammered.

"I know, Mikey, I know. I love you, too. But we can't go on like this.

Maybe some time apart will be good for us, and we can remember how much we mean to each other."

Mike started to cry violently, and Will hurried over to him, pulling him into a hug.

"It'll just be for a little while, Mike. Enough time for us to figure all of this out and make sure that we do belong together. Because I do want us to be together, Mike, but not like this."

Mike broke out of the hug and wiped away some of his tears as he looked Will in the eyes.

"If this is what you want, Will, then I'll do it."

"Okay," Will said, nodding. "Then I think I'll go and stay with Jonathan. You can afford this apartment, but I can't without a steady income, so I'd better go stay with him. This way I'm still in the city and we can still see each other when we both think the time is right."

Mike didn't say anything, but nodded as Will turned and walked into their bedroom, shutting the door behind them. Mike sat down at the dining table, unable to look at the food, feeling suddenly nauseous. He never thought his relationship with Will would come to this: a trial separation. He felt like a failure. Mike sat his head down on the dining table and started to cry again. When he finally ran out of tears, Will reappeared in the living room with a suitcase packed. Mike stood up and hurried over to Will and hugged him tightly.

"Just for a little bit right?" he asked in a voice that sounded like a child's.

"Right, Mike. Just for a little bit while we both figure things out. And then we'll move back in together and we'll live happily ever after."

Mike chuckled through the fresh wave of tears falling down his face. Will was crying, too, and seemed as unwilling as Mike to let go. Finally, they both stopped crying and broke the hug, keeping their arms wrapped around each other.

"Now, listen, Mike, maybe we should see other people while we're apart," Will said. "It won't be cheating since we're not together, and

maybe it'll help show us that we're meant to be together, like this separation is supposed to."

Mike sighed deeply.

"If you want to, you can, Will," he said in a heavy voice. "But I made a promise to you and I intend on keeping that promise. I will never love anyone else in this life. My heart belongs to you, Will, and that's just a physical law of the universe. But if you want to try dating others, I won't stop you. But I'm not going to."

"I'm giving you permission to," Will said.

"It doesn't matter," Mike retorted. "I'm not going to break that promise to you."

"Okay, Mike. Okay."

"I love you, Will," Mike said as he gave Will a kiss on the forehead.

"I love you, too, Mike," Will replied, blushing slightly. "I'll miss you, and I'll always be thinking of you. But some time apart will be good for us."

Will opened the apartment door and disappeared through it before shutting it.

"If you say so, Will."

Two years later

Mike knocked on the apartment door. He didn't have to wait long before his twin opened the door and Richie's eyes widened in delight.

"Mike and Ike!" Richie exclaimed, throwing the door open and pulling Mike into a hug. "How the hell are you, brother?"

"I'm fine, Rich, and don't call me that," Mike said slightly irritably, but grinning.

"You know you love it, Mike and Ike," Richie retorted as he led Mike

into his apartment. Richie's husband, and Will's cousin, Chris, was sitting in the recliner, and looked up in surprise when Richie led Mike into the living room. "Look what the cat dragged in, my love!"

"Well ain't this a nice surprise?" Chris said as he stood up and pulled Mike into a hug. "How you doing, Mikey?"

"I'm all right, Chris," Mike replied as he sat down on the sofa with Richie. "Been keeping busy ever since I joined the law firm."

"And I heard you won your first case!" Chris exclaimed. "Congratulations!"

Mike beamed at him.

"You heard about that?"

"How dare you insult me like that, Mike and Ike!" Richie said. "Of course I told my husband about my brother's big career achievement! Give me a little credit!"

"It's not that big of a deal," Mike said sheepishly.

"Of course it is, Mike!" Chris said. "It's a huge deal. You should be proud of yourself."

"Yeah, yeah," Mike said, waving his hand impatiently. "Well, enough about me, can we talk about the art gallery opening?"

"Oh, *that's* why you're here," said Richie, wriggling his eyebrow.

"Fuck off, Richie," Chris snapped, though he was smiling. "If anyone has a right to attend Will's art gallery opening, it's Mike."

"Course he does, Chris," Richie said, rolling the Rs in Chris' name. "My dear brother is an old school romantic, just like me."

"Shut up, Richie," Chris and Mike said together. They looked at each other and grinned.

"Are you sure Will would want me there? I mean, we haven't exactly seen each other properly since we broke up..."

"Of course he'd love to see you, Mike," Chris interrupted. "Will loves you. That much I can tell you. And he'd love to see you there, even if it would be a little awkward since he's d..."

Chris stopped talking when he noticed Richie glaring at him. He closed his mouth awkwardly.

"It's okay, Chris," Mike said. "We agreed that we could date other people while we were broken up. So, who is the lucky guy?"

"He's just a friend, I think," Chris mumbled. "Nothing too serious. Look, I'm gonna go take a quick shower before we go."

Chris stood up and walked out of the living room, looking visibly uncomfortable about having let slip that Will was seeing someone else. Mike turned to Richie when he saw they were alone.

"Still can't sleep?" Richie asked.

"How'd you know?"

"Just look at yourself, Mike," Richie said in a tone that was devoid of his usual humor, but it was soft and emotional, just the thing Mike needed. "You have circles under your eyes and you always look exhausted whenever I see you. Have you still been having trouble sleeping?"

"I haven't slept well since that night. I haven't been able to."

"Mike, that was two years ago," Richie said. "It's not healthy, you doing that to yourself."

"I know, but I can't help it, Rich. I love him too much. I'll sleep better when we're together again."

"God I hope you both get your heads out of your asses soon and realize that you guys are meant to be together," Richie said in an annoyed tone. "Seriously, Mike, I thought you guys were supposed to be the smart ones. Just fucking go to the art gallery opening with me and Chris, and talk to him. I guarantee you both are still in love with each other."

"I hope you're right."

Mike's breath hitched when Will appeared at the ribbon cutting ceremony to open his new art gallery. Will had changed his hair so that it was cut much shorter than Mike had ever seen it and Mike found himself instantly in love with the haircut. Will also appeared happier than Mike had seen him in a long time, and he couldn't help but feel sad that he didn't get to share this moment with Will, at least not directly since they weren't dating at the moment.

Will took the pair of scissors he was handed and cut the ribbon, officially opening up his art gallery exhibit. The audience cheered and Will beamed at everyone.

"Enjoy everybody!" Will yelled to the crowd.

There were several moments of mingling before Mike caught up with Chris and Richie, who were both chatting animatedly with Will, Joyce, Jonathan and a man that Mike didn't recognize. Mike knew this must be the "friend" Chris had told him about. Mike looked at the man and saw that he looked somewhat similar to Mike himself: long hair, a head taller than Will and so skinny that it looked like he rarely ate anything of substance.

Mike took a deep sigh before he walked over to the others. Joyce saw him first and beamed at him.

"Mike! Oh, honey, it's so good to see you!" Joyce exclaimed as she wrapped her arms around him and held him tightly for several seconds.

"It's good to see you too, Joyce," Mike said, feeling a lump in his throat as he locked eyes with Will for the first time since he and Will separated.

Mike and Joyce broke their hug as Will approached Mike, as if daring to believe that Mike was real. After several seconds, Will flung himself into Mike's embrace and held him tightly.

"It's so good to see you, Mikey!" Will exclaimed. "Thank you for

coming!"

"Really? I thought you wouldn't want me here," Mike said quietly.

"What? Of course I wanted you here! Didn't Nancy tell you about my messages I left for you?"

"No, I never heard from her."

"Jonathan, tell your wife to step up her game!" Will exclaimed to his brother, who grinned at him.

"Yeah, sure, I'll get right on that, Will," Jonathan replied.

"Anyway, Mike, this is Danny, a dear friend of mine I met a year or so ago," Will said, gesturing to the man standing next to him.

If Mike had to judge, he could have sworn he saw a look of contempt flash over Danny's face, but it was gone in the next moment. Danny held out a hand and shook Mike's.

"Nice to meet you, Mike," Danny said. "I've heard a lot about you. You being Will's best friend and all."

"Yeah, that's me," Mike said.

"Hey, listen, can you guys give us a minute alone?" Will asked. "It's been too long since we've seen each other!"

"Yeah, of course, honey," Joyce said, shoving the others away from Mike and Will and following them.

Will turned to Mike and hugged him again.

"It's so good to see you, Mike. You look great."

Mike chuckled.

"Richie seems to think I look exhausted," he said.

"Nah, you look fine, Mike. Exactly how I remember you. So, how have you been? Are you here with anyone?"

"I'm here with Richie and Chris," Mike said.

"Yeah, but didn't you bring someone else with you?"

"Why would I?" Mike asked. Suddenly, it dawned on him. "Oh, Will. I was totally serious when I told you that I wasn't going to date anyone during our separation, even if it does feel permanent at this point."

Will sighed.

"I'm sorry about that, Mike. I wanted to get back together when you were done with law school, but then I started doing all of these pieces and I knew that my art was getting a life of its own. Before I knew it, it was time to open this gallery up. I'm really sorry, Mike."

"I know you are, Will. It's okay. I'm really excited and happy for you."

"Thanks, Mikey. So, what have you been up to?"

"I'm working as a junior associate at a law firm here in town. I recently won my first case."

"Mike, that's great!"

Mike grinned.

"Yeah and to celebrate, the company is letting me use up the vacation time I accumulated while working on the case. So, tomorrow, Richie and I are flying back home to Hawkins to visit the family."

"That'll be good for you, Mike. And listen, maybe we can meet up for drinks or something when you get back. To talk things over. I think it's been long enough with us being apart and now that we're starting our careers, we don't have to worry about money all the time like we used to."

"I'd like that, Willie," Mike said, pulling Will into another hug. "I'll give you a call when I get back into town."

Five days later

Chris walked into Jonathan and Will's apartment and sat down at the bar with Will while Jonathan made them drinks in the kitchen.

"To my best friend and cousin: congratulations on your art gallery opening," Chris toasted Will.

The three of them drank from their glasses before setting them down. Jonathan busied himself in the kitchen while Chris and Will talked.

"I'm sorry I didn't come sooner, Will. Work has been murder the past couple of days. Thank god I can use a sick day to take time off and come and see you guys."

"Nah, don't worry about it," Will said, waving his hand. "I understand. Work can be a hassle."

"Speaking of that, I wanted to talk to you about Mike."

Will sighed.

"Look, you know I don't judge you for wanting to take a break from him, Will. I get that you felt neglected, but can you really blame Mike for trying to earn extra money to make sure you guys were okay financially?"

"Chris, I'm not interested in getting into an argument here."

"Neither am I, nor am I in much of a mood to give a lecture, but I'm gonna give you one anyway, Will. Now, just listen to me for a minute: I know this is not my place, but you have been incredibly selfish when it comes to Mike. And you're not a selfish person, Will."

"I'm being selfish?"

"Yes, you are and just shut up and listen for a moment. I know how stubborn you are, Will, and that's why I know you feel like you're in the right. But I also know that you're hurting, Will. You're hurting because you hurt Mike and you know that. And it's hard for you to forgive yourself because it means admitting you were wrong. Now, correct me if I'm wrong."

Will remained silent before he nodded.

"That's what I thought," Chris said. "Now, listen, I'm not saying what I'm about to say to make you feel bad, but maybe it'll help prod you in the right direction: Mike is falling to fucking pieces without you, Will. I know he won't admit it, but he is. He's told Richie many times that he hasn't been able to sleep since you guys split. And I know that he loves you, Will, and you love him. And maybe it's time the both of you pulled your heads out of your asses and talked to each other, just like couples are supposed to do when they're having a difficult time."

Will and Chris simply stared at each other for several moments before Will took a deep breath and nodded.

"You're right, Chris. I do miss him. And I can't live without him. I love him. God, how could I be so mean to him?"

Just then, the phone rang and Jonathan hurried to answer it.

"Because you're too prideful, but I love you anyway," Chris said, playfully nudging Will on the arm. "Now, listen, you'd better give Mike..."

"WHAT?" Jonathan practically shouted into the phone. "Oh my god, that's horrible, Richie. How did it happen?"

Will and Chris looked over at Jonathan, frowning. Jonathan had a look of shock etched onto his face, which grew as Richie kept talking to him on the other side of the call.

"Oh, I just feel awful about this, Richie. How are you doing?"

There was a brief pause.

"Is there anything I can do, Richie? Anything?" Another pause. "Well, yeah, you go ahead and call all of them. I'll figure something out with Will and Chris. They're here right now. They'll give you a call as soon as they've gotten something worked out. Okay. Bye, Richie."

Jonathan hung up the phone and looked up at Will and Chris.

"Jonathan, what happened?" Will demanded.

"Richie and Mike's dad died."

Will and Chris' mouths both dropped.

"Oh my god," Will shrieked.

"How did it happen?" Chris asked. "Was Ted sick or something?"

"No, it was a heart attack, it was sudden. He fell asleep in his recliner and he never woke up. So he didn't suffer at all."

"That's awful," Chris said. "Well we'd better start searching for flights to go back to Hawkins. The boys are gonna need us. Will?"

Will looked at Chris with tears forming in his eyes.

"What am I gonna do? He's not gonna wanna see me!"

"Hey, hey, listen: Mike needs you, Will. If anything, he's gonna be relieved that you came with me. Just be there for him, Will. He needs a shoulder to cry on. He needs *you*."

The front door to the Wheeler home opened and Karen stood in the door frame with tears in her eyes. As soon as she realized it was Will and Chris, she lunged forward and pulled both young men into a hug.

"Oh, thank goodness you boys got here safely," she said.

"Are you okay, Karen?" Chris demanded as he gave his mother-in-law a kiss on the forehead.

"I'm just glad all of my kids are here now," Karen replied. "Richie is upstairs in his and Mike's old room," she added and Chris nodded at her.

"And Mike?" Will asked in a small voice.

"He's down in the basement, Will. He'll be glad to see you."

"I'm not so sure," Will said, looking down in shame. "He must hate me for not speaking to him for so long until he came to my art gallery opening."

"Oh, honey, I promise he doesn't feel like that. He was so happy to see you last week, Will. He hasn't quit talking about it since he got here. He'll be glad that you're here."

"See, Will? I told you!" Chris exclaimed. "Now go and see him while I go take care of my husband!"

Will and Karen giggled as Chris hurried to the staircase and walked up the stairs. Will gave Karen another hug before he walked through the kitchen and to the basement door. He walked down the steps, feeling like a kid again and that was going to attend another D&D campaign with the rest of The Party.

The basement looked the same as ever. Many of Will's old drawings were still hanging on the wall. The table they all used to use for their campaigns was still set up in the same spot it was always in, ready for another game.

Mike was sitting on the couch with his hands buried in his face. Will approached him cautiously, but Mike didn't respond. Will took a deep breath before he spoke.

"Hey Mike," he said quietly.

Mike's head shot up. Relief spread on Mike's face as he realized it was Will. Quick as a flash, Mike shot up and threw himself onto Will and hugged him tightly. Both of them started to cry and they quickly lost their balance and fell backward onto the couch. They held each other tightly, crying, for several moments before they calmed down enough to have a conversation.

"I'm really glad you're here," Mike said.

"Oh thank god," Will replied. "I thought you wouldn't want me here."

"Are you kidding, Will? Of course I want you here. I *need* you here!"

Mike gave Will a kiss on the cheek and blushed slightly. Will started to cry again.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Mike asked in the gentle tone that was usually reserved for Will.

"I'm so sorry, Mike!"

"For what, baby?"

"For hurting you! I can't believe how selfish I was, leaving you like that! You didn't deserve that. I don't deserve you. I understand if you don't want to take me back, but I just had to say how sorry I am for being so horrible to you."

Will broke down completely at this and Mike pulled him in for a tighter hug as he started to cry again, too. Mike held Will protectively and whispered words of comfort into his ear. Finally, Will stopped crying and Mike broke the hug.

"It's okay, Will," Mike said reassuringly.

"No it's not, Mike!"

"But it will be," Mike said calmly. "We're together now and that's all that matters. All that matters is that I love you, Will. I have always loved you and I will always love you, Will."

"I love you, too, Mike," Will said. "God, I love you."

Will leaned forward and pressed their lips together. It was a wet and messy kiss, with both of them crying through it and holding each other tightly. When they broke the kiss, they both looked at each other and couldn't help but laugh at how messy they both looked.

Mike grabbed Will and pulled him closer as he laid down on the couch. Will wrapped his arms around Mike and rested his head on Mike's chest.

"What about Danny?" Mike asked in a playful tone.

Will giggled.

"That clown? He was only interested in my looks and only wanted to get into my pants. Fuck him."

"Did he? Get into your pants?"

"Are we seriously having this conversation right now?" Will asked, flabbergasted. "If it means so much to you: No, he didn't get into my pants."

"Good cause I'm the only one allowed there."

Will laughed so hard he started to cry.

"I love you so much, Mikey."

"I love you, too, Willie."

They closed their eyes and fell asleep in each other's arms. And that's how Karen found them hours later when she went to check on them. She smiled at their sleeping figures and threw a blanket over them before she kissed both of them on their foreheads.

"I love you boys," she said, wiping a tear away.